CULTURE FROM NORTH FLORIDA
- Robert H. McCubbin

By now your Hibiscus plants in the north Florida area should be showing nice new growth as well as showing good signs of pulling through the past winter. All banking and cold preventative measures should have been done away with by this time. It is time now to encourage your Hibiscus to put on new growth and bloom.

High nitrogen content feedings should have been started by March 1st. and if you haven't then only about one more application is necessary before starting on a more balanced formula such as a good grade of 4-7-5 or even a 4-8-8 with about 25% or better organic mixture. This balanced formula should be given your plants about every 5 to 6 weeks up to about the latter part of September. By all means keep your plants well watered but at the same time well drained. Now if you think that this is all that is necessary, you're mistaken, Read on.

All of the nice new and tender growth is so enticing to those little pests such as scale, spider mites, mealy bugs, thrips, aphids, beetles, grasshoppers and caterpillars. They are so anxious to have a glorious feast on your nice Hibiscus. So if you want nice healthy plants you had better know how to combat those insects. A good oil emulsion spray in most cases will combat most of the insects that you will encounter. There are many good brands on the market today and your local nursery retailer can give good advise as to what and how to use. By all means follow the instruction given on the labels. One suggestion in spraying a liquid is to drench the leaves both on top and underneath. The excess that falls on the ground will do no harm.

Some oil emulsion sprays do not have enough effect on some of the larger chewing insects therefore a stronger poison must be used. Arsenic of lead dust in many cases will do wonders but then this poison should be used with caution. Follow the instructions to the letter.

We have not had much of the little known black

splash disease in this area. It has not been proved what causes this disease but some think that it is a nutritional trouble. The disease generally starts with a black mouldy appearance where the stem meets the leaf and spreads outward to the tips of the leaf. This causes the leaf to turn yellow and then drop off. This in turn helps spread the disease to other plants. It has been suggested that if your plant develops the disease the plant should be cut back beyond the spot where the disease appears and to keep the plant sprayed with a nutritional spray high in copper content. The plants should be sprayed about every 4 to 6 weeks until the disease disappears. At present this disease is being studied by leading pathologists as well as the Agricultural and Experiment Station at the University of Florida.

Have you been thinking about cuttings and grafts of your favorite plants? Now is as good a time as ever to get started on that project. Grafting is generally considered more favorable than making cuttings. It is quicker and the percentage of yield is in most cases higher. The side graft is easier and most popular. Also the parent plant can be grafted a second time if the first graft does not take. Where the amount of wood is limited such as in some really fine or rare varieties, the chip bud method is suggested. The "Scarlet Red" and "Painted Lady" as well as "Versicolor", make excellent understock for grafting. Those three seem to be the hardiest and faster growing and are quite resistant to root knot. It is best to do your grafting while the plants are still in quart cans or gallon containers. I prefer the gallon size.

Don't forget to try some air layering. This method produces a larger plant in the quickest time. Some varieties that are hard to root by cuttings and equally as hard to graft will sometimes take to this method quicker.

With all of the care as suggested above, here's hoping you'll have the most prize winning blooms of the year. By all means, attend as many of the Hibiscus shows in your area as possible and do your part to encourage the interest in growing such a beautiful flower, the Hibiscus.

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